

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

PHILLIP J. BARKETT, JR.,

Plaintiff,

-against-

SOCIÉTÉ GÉNÉRALE, DANIEL BOUTON, and
ROBERT A. DAY,

Defendants.

Civil Action No. 1:08-CV-2495 (GEL)

CITY OF TAYLOR EMPLOYEES
RETIREMENT SYSTEM, Individually and On
Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated,

Plaintiff,

VS.

SOCIÉTÉ GÉNÉRALE GROUP, DANIEL
BOUTON and ROBERT A. DAY,

Defendants.

Civil Action No. 1:08-CV-2752 (GEL)

HAROLD OBERKOTTER, Individually and On
Behalf of All Others Similarly Situated,

Plaintiff,

VS.

SOCIÉTÉ GÉNÉRALE, DANIEL BOUTON, and
ROBERT A. DAY,

Defendants.

Civil Action No. 1:08-CV-2901 (GEL)

**DECLARATION OF KENT A. BRONSON IN SUPPORT OF
THE NEW JERSEY CARPENTERS ANNUITY AND PENSION FUNDS’
MEMORANDUM OF LAW IN OPPOSITION TO
COMPETING LEAD PLAINTIFF MOTIONS**

I, Kent Bronson, under penalties of perjury, hereby declare:

1. I am a member of Milberg LLP. I submit this declaration in support of the New Jersey Carpenters Annuity and Pension Funds' Memorandum of Law in Opposition to Competing Lead Plaintiff Motions.

2. Attached hereto as Exhibit A is a true and correct copy of the order and opinion in *Tsirekidze v. Syntax-Brilliant Corp.*, No. CV-07-2204-PHX-FJM (D. Ariz. Apr. 4, 2008).

Dated: May 30, 2008

Respectfully submitted,

MILBERG LLP

By: /s/ Kent A. Bronson

Kent A. Bronson

One Pennsylvania Plaza, 49th Floor

New York, New York 10119

Telephone: (212) 594-5300

Facsimile: (212) 868-1229

kbronson@milberg.com

EXHIBIT A

1 **WO**

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6 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
7 FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA
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9 Teimuraz Tsirekidze, On Behalf of
10 Himself and All Others Similarly Situated,

11 Plaintiff,

12 vs.

13 Syntax–Brilliant Corp., Vincent F. Sollitto,
14 Jr., and Wayne Pratt,

15 Defendants.
16

No. CV-07-2204-PHX-FJM

ORDER

CONSOLIDATING

17 The Nagel Family Trust, On Behalf of
18 Itself and All Others Similarly Situated,

19 Plaintiff,

20 vs.

21 Syntax–Brilliant Corp. A.K.A. Olevia
22 International Group, Inc., Vincent F.
Sollitto, Jr., James Ching Hua Li, Man Kit
(Thomas) Chow, and Wayne Pratt,

23 Defendants.
24

No. CV-07-2454-PHX-ROS

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1 Angelko Bogdanov, On Behalf of Himself)
and All Others Similarly Situated,

No. CV-07-2524-PHX-ROS

2 Plaintiff,

3 vs.

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5 Syntax-Brilliant Corp., Vincent F. Sollitto,
Jr., James Li, and Wayne Pratt,

6 Defendants.
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9 Paula Langley, Individually and On Behalf
of All Others Similarly Situated,

No. CV-07-2525-PHX-SRB

10 Plaintiff,

11 vs.

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13 Syntax-Brilliant Corp., Vincent F. Sollitto,
Jr., and Wayne Pratt,

14 Defendants.
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18 Four securities class actions have been filed in this district against defendant
19 Syntax-Brilliant Corp. and several of its officers. Five members of the proposed class now
20 move for consolidation of the actions, for appointment as lead plaintiff, and for approval of
21 lead counsel. The court has before it the following documents: Syntax Investor Group's
22 motion, (doc. 6), supporting memorandum (doc. 7), memorandum in response to competing
23 motions (doc. 27), and reply in further support of its own (doc. 36); the McCullough
24 Family's motion (doc. 23), supporting memorandum (doc. 8), supporting declaration of
25 Gustavo Bruckner (doc. 9), response to competing motions (doc. 28), and reply in further
26 support of its own (doc. 37); Angelko Bogdanov, John Gardini, and Bloomfield, Inc.'s
27 motion (doc. 11), supporting memorandum (doc. 12), and supporting declaration of Frank
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1 Verdame (doc. 14);¹ the Farrukh Group's motion and supporting memorandum (doc. 15),
2 response to competing motions (doc. 30), and reply in support of its own (doc. 38); and the
3 City of St. Clair Shores Police and Fire Retirement System's motion (doc. 17), supporting
4 memorandum (doc. 18), supporting declaration of Michael Salcido (doc. 19), response to
5 competing motions (doc. 32), and reply in further support of its own (doc. 40).

6 I

7 All four complaints name as defendants Syntax–Brilliant Corp. ("Syntax"), a
8 manufacturer and distributor of high definition televisions based in Tempe, Arizona; Vincent
9 Sollitto, Jr., who is chairman of the company's board of directors and served as chief
10 executive officer until September 30, 2007; and Wayne Pratt, who was the company's chief
11 financial officer and vice president until September 30, 2007. Two of the complaints name
12 additional defendants. One adds James Ching Hua Li, a company director who became
13 chief executive officer in October 2007;² the other adds James Ching Hua Li as well as
14 Man Kit Chow, the company's executive vice president and chief procurement officer.³

15 All four complaints seek recovery under Sections 10(b) and 20(a) of the Securities and
16 Exchange Act of 1934, 15 U.S.C. §§ 78j(b), 78t (2006). Plaintiffs allege that defendants
17 overstated profits and projections, concealed shortfalls, and otherwise misled investors,
18 which caused an artificial inflation of Syntax stock price. The complaints propose a class of
19 investors who suffered losses when the stock dropped precipitously on September 13, 2007,
20 following a company announcement that Syntax revenues were much lower than anticipated.
21 Three complaints propose essentially the same "class period"—that the class be open to those
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25 ¹ The court also has before it the Bogdanov Group's supporting memorandum that
26 appears only on the docket of No. CV-07-2524-PHX-ROS (doc. 41).

27 ² No. CV-07-2524-PHX-ROS

28 ³ No. CV-07-2454-PHX-ROS

1 who acquired Syntax stock roughly between May 1, 2007, and September 13, 2007. One
2 complaint proposes a longer class period, February 9, 2007, to November 14, 2007.⁴

3 II

4 Under Rule 42, Fed. R. Civ. P., we may consolidate “actions involving a common
5 question of law or fact.” The complaints in these four actions are nearly identical, and the
6 minor differences in proposed class periods and named individual defendants are not
7 obstacles to consolidation. Olsen v. N.Y. Comm. Bancorp, Inc., 233 F.R.D. 101, 104–105
8 (E.D.N.Y. 2005). Therefore, the motions to consolidate are granted.

9 The method for appointing a lead plaintiff in a securities class action is governed by
10 the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995 (“PSLRA”), 15 U.S.C. § 78u-4 (2006).
11 The party who files the action must publicize its pendency, the proposed class period, and
12 the nature of the claims. § 78u-4(a)(3)(A)(i). The publication must also inform potential
13 class members that they have 60 days to come forward and move to be appointed lead
14 plaintiff. § 78u-4(a)(3)(A)(ii). If, as here, multiple class actions are brought asserting
15 substantially the same claims, publication is required only of the first to file, in this case
16 Syntax Investor Group. § 78u-4(a)(3)(A)(ii). Once the 60-day window closes, the court
17 determines the lead plaintiff (“most adequate plaintiff”).

18 Under the PSLRA, the court “shall adopt a presumption that the most adequate
19 plaintiff is the person or group of persons that . . . has the largest financial interest in the
20 relief sought by the class” *and* “otherwise satisfies the requirements of Rule 23 of the
21 Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.” § 78u-4(a)(3)(B)(iii)(I). Only two requirements of
22 Rule 23, commonly referred to as “typicality” and “adequacy,” are relevant to the selection
23 of lead plaintiff. In re Cavanaugh, 306 F.3d 726, 730 (9th Cir. 2002). First, the claims or
24 defenses of the lead plaintiff must be “typical of the claims or defenses of the class.” Second,
25 the lead plaintiff must be able to “fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class.”
26 Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a)(3)–(4). Once the presumption is established, other potential lead
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28 ⁴ No. CV-07-2524-PHX-ROS

1 plaintiffs may rebut it with proof that the “presumptively most adequate plaintiff” *does not*
2 satisfy the two requirements of Rule 23. § 78u-4(a)(3)(B)(iii)(II). This perplexing statutory
3 scheme suggests that the initial determination on typicality and adequacy “should be a
4 product of the court’s independent judgment, and that arguments by members of the
5 purported plaintiff class . . . should be considered *only* in the context of assessing whether
6 the presumption has been rebutted.” In re Cendant Corp. Litig., 264 F.3d 201, 263–64
7 (3d. Cir. 2001).

8 Therefore, we must first rank potential lead plaintiffs in order of financial interest.
9 Beginning with the potential lead plaintiff who has the greatest financial interest, we make
10 a determination on typicality and adequacy, relying only on that party’s “complaint and
11 sworn certification.” In re Cavanaugh, 306 F.3d at 730. If the party has made a prima facie
12 showing of typicality and adequacy, that party becomes the presumptive lead plaintiff, and
13 we then consider rebuttal evidence from competing movants for lead plaintiff. If the
14 presumption is not rebutted, lead plaintiff is determined. If, however, the presumption is
15 either not established or is successfully rebutted, we go back and consider the typicality and
16 adequacy of the potential lead plaintiff who has the *next greatest* financial interest,
17 proceeding so on until a lead plaintiff is found. Id. at 731.

18 Before applying the PSLRA approach, we note that its enactment was an effort by
19 Congress to counteract the tendency of securities class actions to be “lawyer driven.” Before
20 PSLRA, lead plaintiff status generally went to the first to file. This resulted in a “race to
21 the courthouse,” and eager counsel rounded up “lead” plaintiffs who effectively exercised
22 no control over the litigation. PSLRA’s notice requirement slows the race and gives
23 seriously interested class members an opportunity to step forward. The presumption in favor
24 of the movant with the greatest financial interest (who satisfies Rule 23) assumes that a class
25 member with much at stake, often a large institutional investor, will have the most incentive,
26 and be in the best position, to actually exert influence over lead counsel. See id. at 729.

The potential lead plaintiffs must be ranked in terms of their “financial interest” in the litigation.⁵ Courts have proposed several metrics by which to measure financial interest. Fortunately, there is little dispute among the parties on this point. The parties essentially agree to a ranking in terms of estimated financial loss as follows: 1) the Farrukh Group (about \$ 300,000), 2) the McCullough Family (about \$ 165,000), 3) the Syntax Investor’s Group (about \$155,000), 4) St. Clair Shores Police and Fire Retirement System (\$28,800), and 5) the Bogdanov Group (\$17,590).

To begin, we decide whether the Farrukh Group, the proposed lead plaintiff with the largest financial interest, satisfies the requirements of Rule 23 based on its motions and declarations. We note that a “district court has latitude as to what information it will consider in determining typicality and adequacy.” In re Cavanaugh, 306 F.3d at 732. On the question of adequacy, we focus on the Farrukh Group’s status as a “group.” Although the PSLRA allows groups to serve as lead plaintiffs, “courts have uniformly refused to appoint as lead plaintiff groups of unrelated individuals, brought together for the sole purpose of aggregating their claims in an effort to become the presumptive lead plaintiff.” In re Gemstar-TV Guide Int’l, Inc. Sec. Litig., 209 F.R.D. 447, 451 (C.D. Cal. 2002). For the most part, to “allow an aggregation of unrelated plaintiffs to serve as lead plaintiffs defeats the purpose of choosing

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1 a lead plaintiff.” In re Donnkenny Inc. Sec. Litig., 171 F.R.D. 156, 157 (S.D.N.Y. 1997).
2 Such a group is unlikely to “fairly and adequately represent the class” because it is unlikely
3 to engage in the litigation in a meaningful way at all. Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a)(4). What is more,
4 when unrelated investors are cobbled together, the clear implication is that counsel, rather
5 than the parties, are steering the litigation. See In re Donnkenny Inc. Sec. Litig., 171 F.R.D.
6 at 158 (“[With the PSLRA,] Congress hoped that the lead plaintiff would seek the lawyers,
7 rather than having the lawyers seek the lead plaintiff.”).

8 From their papers, it appears that the Farrukh “Group” consists of three completely
9 unrelated individuals from different parts of the country. There is no suggestion how they
10 plan to work together as a cohesive unit. As far as we can tell, each individual has so far
11 participated only to the extent of signing his name onto a boilerplate “certification in support
12 of application of lead plaintiff.” See Motion of the Farrukh Group (doc. 15), Ex. A. At one
13 point, the group suggests that we pluck one of its top-two constituents to serve as lead
14 plaintiff “if this Court does not appoint a group as the lead plaintiff.” Reply of the
15 Farrukh Group (doc. 38) at 6. We decline to do so. The Farrukh Group moved for lead
16 plaintiff as a group and will be evaluated as such. The willingness to abandon the group only
17 suggests how loosely it was put together.

18 Given no evidence of cohesiveness, we are not convinced that the Farrukh Group will
19 adequately represent this class. Cf. In re Northwestern Corp. Sec. Litig., 299 F. Supp. 2d
20 997, 1006 (D.S.D. 2003) (approved group had established a plan for conducting litigation,
21 including mechanisms to call meetings and resolve disagreements). Even if the Farrukh
22 Group had established itself as presumptive lead plaintiff, there is rebuttal evidence.
23 Competing movant Syntax Investor Group has brought to our attention a “press release”
24 issued by the Farrukh Group’s counsel the day before the lead-plaintiff window closed,
25 which “urges” Syntax investors to sign up with the firm. Syntax Investor Group’s Reply
26 at 8–9. All members of the Farrukh Group signed certifications in support of lead
27 plaintiff status the next day, January 15, 2008, the day lead plaintiff motions were due.
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1 The Farrukh Group does not contest that their participation was a product of
2 counsel's "press release." They even suggest that their signing certifications on the same day
3 (the day motions were due) is evidence of the group's cohesiveness. Farrukh Group's
4 Response (doc. 30) at 9. We are not persuaded. Without determining the ethical
5 implications of counsel's patent effort to solicit clients, we conclude that the Farrukh Group's
6 formation runs directly contrary to the goals of the PSLRA—to reduce lawyer-driven
7 litigation. The Farrukh Group will not be appointed lead plaintiff.

8 Next, we turn to the McCullough Family group, which has the second greatest
9 financial interest. Oddly, the group's principal member, Robert McCullough, Jr., was
10 initially named as a member of a competing proposed lead plaintiff, the Syntax Investor
11 Group. Syntax Investor Group's Motion (doc. 6), Ex. B. In his sworn declaration,
12 McCullough states that he sent his lead-plaintiff certification to the wrong firm "in error."
13 Memorandum of the McCullough Family (doc. 28), Ex. A. Such a blatant gaffe does not
14 bode well for the adequacy of his group to lead this litigation.

15 The McCullough Family also has difficulty under the typicality prong of Rule 23.
16 Typicality is not satisfied when a proposed lead plaintiff is subject to a unique defense, which
17 could become the focus of the litigation. Zenith Labs., Inc. v. Carter-Wallace, Inc., 530 F.2d
18 508, 512 (3d. Cir. 1976). A review of Robert McCullough, Jr.'s trading history reveals that
19 he was unusually active, making as many as 80 separate transactions of Syntax-Brilliant stock
20 in a single day. Declaration of Gustavo Bruckner (doc. 9), Ex. 3. Such a high-volume day
21 trader might be subject to the unique defense that frantic trading belies any true reliance on
22 company reports or even on the integrity of the stock price itself. See In re Safeguard
23 Scientifics, 216 F.R.D. 577, 582 (E.D. Pa. 2003) (noting that day traders often focus on
24 technical price movements rather than price). While a day trader is not ipso facto
25 disqualified from the lead plaintiff role, McCullough's unique trading pattern combined
26 with questions about adequacy establish that his group should not represent the class.

1 Next in terms of financial interest is the Syntax Investor Group. This group fails the
2 adequacy prong of Rule 23 for much the same reason as the Farrukh Group. There is simply
3 no evidence that this "group" has a meaningful connection. The group's lack of cohesion is
4 clearly evidenced by the fact, mentioned above, that its initial motion included Robert
5 McCullough, Jr. as a member, even though he had retained separate counsel and was soon
6 filing competing motions of his own.

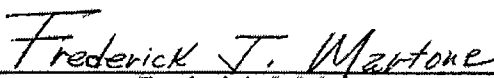
7 We next turn to the City of St. Clair Shores Police and Fire Retirement System
8 ("St. Clair"). This is the first group that satisfies both prongs of Rule 23. The opposing
9 movants make no argument against St. Clair other than pointing out its relatively low
10 financial stake in the litigation. But we have thoroughly applied the In re Cavanaugh test,
11 and St. Clair is the first to meet its standards. We are especially encouraged that the client
12 is a public retirement fund and thus more likely to control counsel. We have reviewed
13 St. Clair's proposal of Coughlin Stoia Geller Rudman & Robbins, LLP, as its proposed lead
14 counsel, and Buckley King as its proposed liaison counsel. We conclude that these firms are
15 more than capable of conducting this litigation in the best interests of the class.

16 Finally, the Bogdanov Group will not be appointed lead plaintiff because the group
17 has less of a financial interest than St. Clair. The Bogdanov Group's contention that one of
18 its constituents is uniquely capable of bringing certain claims is without merit.

19 IV

20 Accordingly, **IT IS HEREBY ORDERED** that St. Clair's motion for consolidation,
21 appointment as lead plaintiff, and approval of counsel (doc. 17) is granted in full. **IT IS**
22 **FURTHER ORDERED** that all other motions (docs. 6, 11, 15 & 23) are **GRANTED**
23 insofar as they move for consolidation, but are otherwise **DENIED**.

24 DATED this 4th day of April, 2008.

25
26 
27 Frederick J. Martone
28 United States District Judge